

Olde Duxbury

In 1888 the town voted to have the selectmen go before the County Commissioners with a request of the Gurnet Bridge Co., formed by William Wright. Authorization for the building of a bridge from Powder Point to Salter's Beach, so called, was given by Chapter 301 of the Acts of 1887. It was decided to build provided it did not cost the town more than \$10,000, but 2-thirds of the estimated cost which was to be the town's share came to \$25,000. Then, on Nov. 20, 1889, another special meeting was held to see if the town really wanted the bridge. William Wright agreed to pay \$15,000 of the town's share, the County agreed to pay the other \$12,500 and the town voted to pay \$10,000. The whole matter was a bit more complicated, but it seemed to resolve itself nicely. The bridge was built in 1892 and dedicated in 1895. It was originally 2,200 feet long, but 2 or 3 sections were removed following the storm of November 1898 when the crest of the beach was moved inland. At this time the Wright family owned the beach from the Hummock to the Plymouth line and had great plans for developing it as a summer resort. I once had a plan of their lot and road layout which I gave to the Beach Association. Three houses were built on the beach soon after the bridge was completed. One was at High Pines, the others were side by side just south of the "half way house," the little shelter where the Coast Guard Patrol from Brant Rock met the patrol from The Gurnet.

All 3 of these houses were floated across the bay on barges some 30 years ago and are now on Landing Rd. I have seen pictures of the beach following the big storm in 1889. I believe this storm was much worse than that of 1898, but no Portland was lost and it did not get publicity. One picture showed the beach where the bridge now ends to be about a third of a mile wide and under water at high tide. The dunes built up rapidly and before the November gale of 1898 were higher than they have been since.

Following this 1889 storm, any idea of further development on the beach was given up by Wright. There was another big storm about 1905 and there have been lesser ones from time to time every few years. Each storm seems to bring the crest of the beach nearer the mainland, and there is evidence of salt marsh turf on the ocean side that perhaps a hundred years ago was green with grass on the bay side. Some geologists think a few thousand years ago the beach followed the line of rock ledges and on to Minot's Ledge. From when I was about 8 to perhaps 12 or 13, a friend and I made an annual trip to The Gurnet at some time during the summer. At about high water mark on the east side was a large rectangular rock about 4 feet square on top and sticking up perhaps 8 feet. Each time we planned to eat our lunch on this rock. The last time I was at The Gurnet the rock was about 300 feet east of the bluff and covered at half tide. When Wright built the 2 houses near the half way

storage of rain water was built some 30 feet west of the houses and 300 feet from the crest of the beach.

After the 1898 storm these 2 houses were moved back to the west. They were moved twice more that I remember, and in 1915 half the cistern was exposed like a big wasp's nest on the side of the high dune. Following the next storm the cistern collapsed. All of which would indicate that the whole beach has moved to the west at least 300 feet during the last 60 years. One of the curious results of this movement has been its effect on various parcels of land situated north of the bridge. Some of these are laid out and described from points on Canal River; others have their descriptions based on points given as being on the crest of the beach.

With westerly movement of the beach one will sometimes find that 2 persons will each claim title to the same parcel of land, the easterly one having slid back. In many ways I have always been fascinated by the "Big Marsh," north of the bridge. I can remember a draw in the bridge over Cut River in Marshfield, faint traces of the remains of Bowen's Wharf, the dugway behind the Island Meadow (dug so Wright's 2 steam yachts could be moored in the hole east of Fire Island, because they were too long to make the bend in the Back River on the east side of the Island Meadow). I have seen pictures of the yachts, the dugway and the mooring. I also remember a large, very old, hollow apple tree at the

westerly end of Saquish which I was told was used by people from Kingston and Duxbury to deposit mail which was picked up by the Boston-Plymouth boat on its ways back to Boston. Cut River is now well filled in, though I have taken a boat through to the Dyke Raod a Brant Rock. The dugway is filled to a point where it is now only a foot or 2 below the level of surrounding marsh, though its straight line indicates the work of man. But taken all together one can easily picture the Boston Packet boat coming through Cut River to Bowen's Wharf loaded with members of the Massachusetts Legislature on their way to Daniel Webster's funeral, or that same packet boat loaded with supplies for Ford's Store on Tremont St., said to

To page 30

OLDE DUXBURY

From page 29

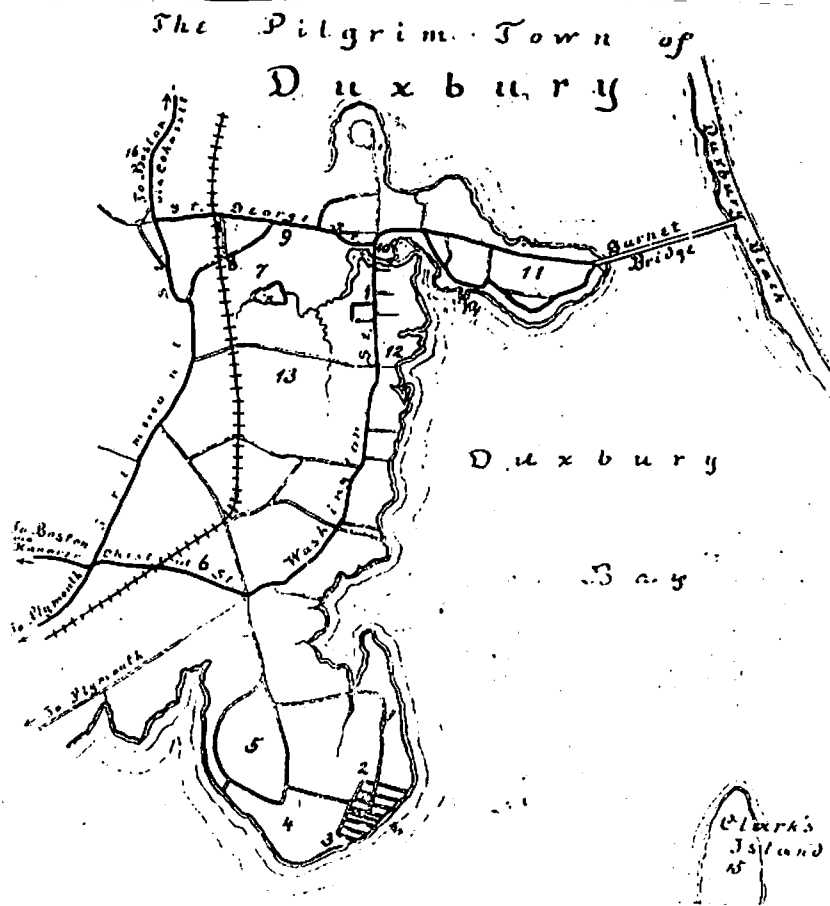
be the first department store in the U.S.

In 1901, the town gave a grant to James Killion, which was transferred that same day to Rocky Point Oyster Co., of Providence. The grant gave permission to plant and later harvest oysters the full length of the beach channel south of the bridge. The following year the second grant extended to the privilege to a part of the main channel north of the bridge. Seed oysters were brought up Narragansett Bay and planted along the channel. Captain Killion's boathouse, now rebuilt and the home of Mrs. Carlton Gifford at the end of River Lane, was adapted for handling the new business. In a short time the seed oysters had grown enough for many to be harvested, and I can well remember having my mother send me over with a pail and orders to bring back a quart or 2 of oysters. I would stand by and watch while they were being shucked into my pail. Had all gone well we might even now be enjoying oysters raised in our own Duxbury Bay, but unfortunately, just as the business seemed well on its way, we had 2 or 3 winters in succession when the bay ice froze to a foot or more and stayed frozen all through the harvest season. I remember the first of these years when a small tug was brought down to serve as an icebreaker and men with saws tried to clear a channel, but the open water soon closed up again and nothing could be done. Some 3 years after that first cold winter the project was given up; and except for a few oysters planted in Blue Fish River near the bridge 30 years ago nothing has been done.

This last planting was of full grown oysters and they were soon after misappropriated by local outlaws, all friends of mine, so no names will be mentioned, though I have to admit I did not share their gains.

The more pleasant experiences of the past are most apt to remain in our thoughts, while those that were sad or distasteful are most easily forgotten. This is especially true of those events which took place during war. I think far more often of the times 2 of us from Dartmouth gave an exhibition of ski jumping in a Paris dance hall, using roller skates instead of skis, than I do of the time a good friend of long standing suffered a direct hit from a German shell. About 150 years ago Thomas More wrote:

"When Time, who steals our years away, Shall steal our pleasures, too, The memory of the past will stay, and half our joys renew."



- Key
1. Information
Paul C. Peterson, Druggist.
 2. The Elder's Estate, site of William Brewster's house.
 3. Site of Myles Standish house.
 4. Alexander Standish house.
 5. Captain's Mill.
Standish Monument.
 6. Myles Standish grave.
and cemetery.
 7. Site of first John Alden house.
 8. The John Alden house.
 9. Library.

10. Historical Room.
Blue Fish River, old
Ship-building Center.
11. Powder Point.
12. Yacht Club.
13. Golf Links.
14. King Cat's Wharf,
John Weston Ship-yard.
15. Pilgrim Rock.
16. First Department Store
in the Country.